

On first thought, it may seem strange to connect the Montana Department of Transportation with historic preservation, but when it comes to bridges, MDT is leading the way. Earlier this year, MDT was able to help secure a spot on the National Register of Historic Places for the Dearborn River High Bridge, 15 miles south west of Augusta on Bean Lake Road.

Owned by Lewis and Clark County, the Dearborn River High Bridge is a rare example of a pin-connected half-deck Pratt truss bridge. It may be the only remaining example of this type of bridge in the United States. The bridge is associated with both the first great period of modern bridge building in Montana and with the agricultural development of the upper Dearborn River. MDT has also been working toward the Toston Bridge on Highway 287 in Broadwater County being listed on the National Register as well.

Montana's bridges give a unique perspective to Montana's history and MDT is committed to preserving their stories. Unfortunately, it is not always feasible to restore or continue to utilize every historic bridge in Montana. When this is the case, MDT makes every effort to facilitate saving them through the Adopt-A-Bridge Program.

Through the Adopt-A-Bridge Program, MDT seeks to find new homes for old steel truss bridges built between 1892 and 1947. These bridges represent Montana's economic, social and technological development during Montana's first century. These structures are gradually being replaced with modern low-profile steel and concrete bridges designed to accommodate today's traffic needs.

Any individual or group willing to accept the financial and legal responsibility, can take ownership of bridges eligible for adoption. These bridges can make excellent river or creek crossings for light traffic to farms, ranches and commercial enterprises. They are also ideal for recreation trails. They are relatively narrow and have limited load capacity and possibly height limitations.

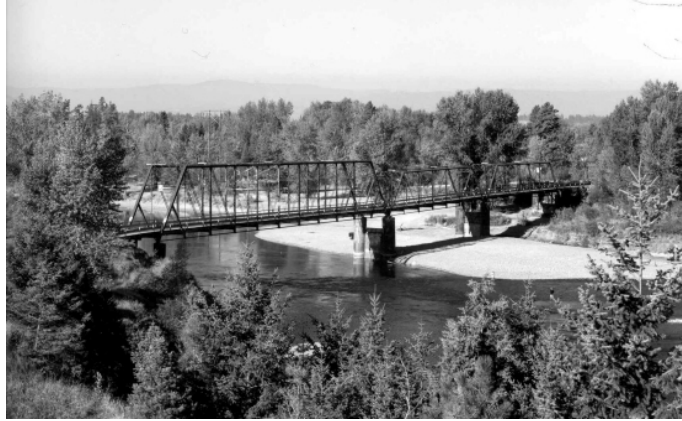
Bridges eligible for adoption have been programmed for replacement, and many qualify for listing on the National Register as culturally and technologically significant objects crucial to the development of the communities and counties they serve. Anyone adopting a bridge through this program must retain the historic features of the bridge that make it eligible for listing on the National Register. There are other requirements as well, and details are available at <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/bridge/adoption.shtml> or by MDT Historian Jon Axline at 444-6258.

One bridge currently being actively advertised for adoption is the Old Steel Bridge across the Flathead River. The bridge crosses the river about two miles east of Kalispell on Old Steel Bridge Road. It was constructed in 1894 by the Gillette-Herzog Manufacturing Company and is a three-span pin-connected Pratt through truss bridge. It has an overall length of 500-feet and consists of two 140-foot spans and a 220-foot main span. The bridge has a vertical clearance of 15'6" and a maximum truss height of 30-feet. The two

140-foot spans weigh an estimated 17-tons each without the timber deck, while the main span weighs an estimated 45-tons with the deck.

MDT intends to construct a new bridge on a new alignment slightly downstream from the existing bridge. Because the old bridge is historic, MDT would give it to anyone willing to relocate, maintain and assume liability for it. MDT

will make \$17,000 available to help with the cost of transporting or rehabilitating each of the 140-foot spans. MDT will provide \$20,000 to help transport the 220-foot truss.



While MDT's goal is to have every eligible bridge adopted, it isn't always feasible. Over the course of the Adopt-A-Bridge program, roughly 16 bridges have been successfully adopted in Montana by organizations or private citizens. It is good program, not just because it also allows these bridges to serve an alternate function rather than being destroyed, but because it allows these landmarks to be preserved. In doing so, it protects the story these bridges have to tell about Montana's past.